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Prestige, Politeness and Power: An Analysis of Chinese Women's Language Use As a Function of Power

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PRESTIGE, POLITENESS AND POWER: AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE WOMEN'S LANGUAGE USE AS A FUNCTION OF POWER

BY

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Contents

I. Introduction

胜人者有力，自胜者強 – 老子

Victory over others makes you powerful, but victory over yourself makes you more powerful. – Laozi, founder of Taoism

Thomas Hobbs, 17th century English philosopher, defined power as "[a person's] present means to obtain some future good […]" and further clarified that "[power is] is not absolute, but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another (Hobbes 1651 n. pg.)." Power, therefore, is something everyone has to some degree, is intangible, and cannot be made outright but instead is completely dependent on the attitudes and thoughts of others. While some people are granted intrinsic power in their society at birth by circumstances of race, sex, and money, others, who are born without these modes of power, must gain it by other means. One group, who is born into a distinct power disadvantage in most societies, is women. How, then, can women gain power within their communities and relationships? One strategy is the selective use of language.

This paper analyzes three aspects of female Mandarin speakers' linguistic power strategy: first is female Beijingers' selective use and disuse of emerging Beijing dialectal features analyzed from prestige theory, second is Chinese females' use of politeness features considered in the context of both Confucianism and politeness theory, and last is an analysis of *sajiao*, a female-exclusive affectation of childish speech in order to entice men into completing their requests, analyzed as a function of both Confucianism and power. These seemingly disparate elements will be shown to be united under a theory of power strategy.

I believe Chinese women present an important opportunity for study of linguistic power theory, both because women in China have recently experienced a great shift in status and rights, and also because the majority of female-differentiated language studies have focused on Western languages and cultures. I believe Chinese women present an important opportunity to study language in use by women in a state of social transition, and also in a non-Western context.

Glossed examples in this paper are given in the following format.

Pinyin	Chinese character (simplified)	普通话 *Pǔtōnghuà* pronunciation in IPA	→	Beijing-accented pronunciation in IPA	English gloss

a. Introduction to the History of Mandarin Chinese

Although Mandarin Chinese is the only Chinese language many Westerners may know about, in fact until recently the majority of Chinese citizens could not speak or understand it. What is now known in English as "Mandarin" first emerged as a koiné of various Northern Chinese dialects used among the ruling class of Chinese in Ming and Qing dynasties, or the 14th through 19th centuries, and gives Mandarin one of its first names, 官话, *guānhuà*, "the language of officials" (Corblin 2000 pg 537). This language was, however, exclusive to the elite rulers of China, and very few people spoke it.

The first push for a national Chinese language came at the end of the 19th century in 1840, specifically after China had been defeated in the First Opium War (Chen 1999 pg 13). A lack of modernization in China was blamed for this loss, and a national language was seen as highly necessary to modernization. At this time most Chinese were both illiterate and monolingual, speaking only their local dialect. Chinese language activists sought to establish a 国语 *Guóyǔ*, a national language (Chen 1999 pg 14).

Although for many centuries literate Chinese, regardless of their actual language, all read the same characters, the local pronunciations of these characters varied so much that two people could read aloud the same passage and not understand each other (Chen 1999 pg 67). This new national language would not only need to establish a standard language, but also a standard pronunciation of this language. Although *guanhua* already existed as a lingua franca for most of China, there was no codified, official form of the pronunciation, it was merely accepted to be the Beijing variety (Chen 1999 pg 14). In the early 20th century push for a national language many other dialects were proposed to be adopted as the pronunciation standard for a national language, while some even suggested that the national form of Chinese should be an amalgamation of several features of the different Chinese languages (Chen 1999 pg 14).

However, all those involved in the debate over the development of a Modern Standard Chinese agreed that there needed to be some phonetic system to cement the pronunciation of this new language. Many phonetic systems were developed, from Roman alphabet systems to Kanji-inspired ones to shorthand-based ones, but most never became popular. The three main phonetic systems still recognized today are *Pinyin*, the official phonetic system of the People's Republic of China and the phonetic system most often used to teach Mandarin to foreigners, also the computer character input system for mainland Chinese and most overseas Chinese (Chen 1999 pg 187); *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, the most used phonetic system in and outside of China and until the invention of pinyin (Chen 1999 pg 182), and *Zhuyin Fuhao* (nicknamed *bopomofo*), a Character-based phonetic system used in the Republic of China (Chen 1999 pg 189).

In 1913, shortly after the founding of the Republic of China, a committee of linguists was tasked with codifying the official pronunciation of *Guoyu*. Although the general consensus was that the *Guoyu* should be based on the Beijing variety, there was also a movement to preserve

other features of important Chinese languages that were extinct in Beijing. Voting on the official pronunciation character-by-character, this commission in 1919 published the first *Guoyu* dictionary, including the official pronunciation of over 12,000 characters, revised forms of which were still in use until 1932 (Chen 1999 pg 17).

This first attempt was very quickly criticized for its complete artificiality, that is to say, the official pronunciation of Chinese was a language no one actually spoke (Chen 1999 pg 18). Local school teachers tasked with teaching this new national language to children struggled with pronouncing it themselves. Official gramophone records were produced by skilled phoneticians to demonstrate how to pronounce the characters. Because of this difficulty implementing the new language, by the 1920s two separate camps had formed about how the *Guoyu* was supposed to be pronounced, there were those who were in favor of the hybridized, artificial pronunciation guide, and those in favor of taking the pronunciation of educated Beijingers as the norm (Chen 1999 pg 19). By 1932 the prevailing opinion was that the Beijing pronunciation should be adopted, and a revised dictionary removing all the non-Beijing features from the national pronunciation guide was published (Chen 1999 pg 20).

The next major occurrence in the making of modern Mandarin Chinese was the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The new Communist Chinese government was greatly concerned with modernizing Chinese, although a large part of their efforts were focused on script reform as opposed to speech reform, as increasing national literacy was considered to be of prime importance (Chen 1999 pg 23). However, there was some attention given to speech reform. Those in favor of preserving features of Chinese languages no longer in the Northern varieties were still active (Chen 1999 pg 24), but in 1955 the Beijing pronunciations were re-codified as the official language of China. The Chinese Communists also

renamed Mandarin once again as 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà*, "common language." At this time Chinese characters also underwent a drastic makeover with the invention and promotion of Simplified Characters, but this is beyond the scope of this paper.

The English word "Mandarin," although ostensibly a name for only one language, actually encompasses a series of dialects and languages with a long and complex political history.

b. Introduction to Women in Chinese society

Since the rise of the People's Republic of China in 1949, women in China have undergone great social, political and economic upheaval. In pre-communist times, Chinese society was very patriarchal, with such cultural phenomena as Confucianism, concubinage and foot binding. However, with the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, women's rights, under the leadership of Mao, were seen as of prime importance to the overall emancipation of the Chinese peasantry (Yuan 2005 pg 53). Women's full equality was written into the Chinese Communist Party constitution of 1950, with marriage and divorce rights, suffrage and maternity leave (Edwards 2000 pg 61). By the 1970s, the party line was that the Chinese Communist Party had single-handedly liberated all Chinese women and full equality with men had been reached (Edwards 2000 pg 59).

It was, however, not that simple. Men and women were supposed to have full job equality, and women were heavily encouraged to work to support themselves and their families, and a man and a woman working the same job in a factory would receive the same wage. However, in the 1970s the average man working on a rural commune would earn 10 work-

points, while a top-performing woman worker could only earn a maximum of 7.5 points, despite these people working the exact same hours per day (Yuan 2005 pg 61).

In addition, at this time women were expected to both work outside of the home and complete all of the domestic work. In rural areas, women would typically leave work early to go home and cook dinner for the later-returning men, leading supervisors to view women as unreliable and pass them over for promotions (Yuan 2005 pg 62). There were two conflicting forces acting upon women, intense propaganda from the Communist Party that women should be "iron girls," hard socialist workers, and also the pressure from traditional social forces encouraging them to be good cooks, seamstresses and household managers (Yuan 2005 pg 62).

In the time after Mao's death, the Chinese Communist Party moved from focusing on class reform to focusing on economic growth with the introduction of the market policy and the reopening of China to foreign interests (Yuan 2005 pg 75). However, the shift in focus, while creating great economic progress, caused a backslide in women's progress. While in 1950, 70% of villages in rural China had one or more female leaders, in the 1990s this number had dropped to 10% (Yuan 2005 pg 76). While in the Mao era women's rights and progress were receiving great support from the Chinese Communist Party, in the post-Mao era this support was gone, and women were forced to compete for their position without aid from the state (Yuan 2005 pg 76).

In addition to the lack of support from the state, the new economic climate also changed the lives of women. Increasingly, rural agricultural work has become feminized as more rural men leave for industrial jobs in cities, leaving women to keep up the farm (Yuan 2005 pg 79). In addition to the fact that rural women are likely to be less educated than their male counterparts and therefore less suitable for working outside the home, the traditional roles also cause the

dichotomy of rural women/urban men. Women have obligations to care for children and elderly relatives which keeps them in their home towns, while men are obligated to seek work to support their family (Yuan 2005 pg 80). Without the influence of Maoism to campaign against it, there has also been a re-popularization of Confucianism (Yuan 2005 pg 83), which encourages women to be subservient to men and serve family interests above their own, further discouraging women to study and work.

The current political situation facing today's Chinese women is very different from the situation of centuries ago and even decades ago. While there are much fewer formal hindrances to female progress, the combined effects of traditional sex roles, the decreasing influence of the state, and increasing globalization ensure that the opportunities available to men and women are very different.

II. Prestige

1. Introduction to Prestige Theory of Language Change

One of the most consistently observed finding in sociolinguistics is that of the language differences between women and men; however, there are many different theories as to why these differences exist. William Labov, who has been studying social stratification in America since the 1960s, proposes a "gender-asymmetrical" model of language change. Men are observably one generation behind women in dialect (Labov 2001 pg 306), that is to say, men's dialect more closely matches that of their mothers than women of their own generation. In addition, women from different classes can be observed to use different dialects, with women from upper and middle classes noticeably using more dialect markers of the higher class, or prestige varieties, than men of their same class (Labov 2001 pg 266), and women from lower classes noticeably using more new dialectal markers than men of their same class (Labov 2001 pg 306). William Labov's Principles of language change are:

> *Principle I:* In stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher level of nonstandard forms than women.
>
> *Principle Ia:* In change from above, women favor the incoming prestige forms more than men.
>
> *Principle II:* In change from below, women are most often the innovators
>
> (quoted from Cheshire 2002 pg 426).

Put simply, prestige theory is that women are more sensitive to language that is most closely associated with higher class in their society, and are more likely to adopt this language as their own. One theory for this gender differentiation is prestige/covert prestige theory, first proposed by Peter Trudgill.

In his 1972 study of women's language usage in relation to their social status, Trudgill postulates that while men are capable of gaining power through occupation, money and education, women cannot do so, and women therefore attempt to signal their status linguistically (Trudgill 1972 pg 182). He also observes that in urban societies working-class speech, along with other elements of working-class culture, convey a covert prestige, an association of masculinity, toughness and street-smarts that men find to be a desirable connotation to their language that women contrarily find undesirable (Trudgill 1972 pg 183). His conclusions were based on research done in the late 1960s in urban Norwich, England.

Deborah Cameron, a well-known feminist linguist, went on to refute Trudgill's claims by pointing out the inherent flaw of his unilaterally linking a woman's social status to her father's or husband's employment, even though her educational and class background may be different, and also his ignoring the role played by the language requirement differences between "blue collar jobs" and "pink collar jobs" (Cameron 1992 pg 64). A "blue collar job" would be a lower middle class traditionally-male job such as plumber, electrician, or construction worker, while a "pink collar job" would be a lower middle class traditionally-female job such as secretary, nurse, school teacher, or hairdresser. She observes that a more standard language is required for pink collar jobs than blue collar ones (Cameron 1992 pg 64).

Instead of a simple prestige theory supported by Trudgill, she supports a broader theory of strength of community ties being directly proportional to the speaker's usage of dialectal

forms (Cameron 1992 pg 68), first proposed by Lesley Milroy in 1980 after conducting a study among working class speakers in Belfast. Through extensive interviews with her subjects, Milroy gave each of them a "network strength score" (NSS) based on level of kinship in the community and whether or not they worked with people from their neighborhood (Hudson 1996 pg 190). She then compared their use of dialectal features against their NSS, and found that the higher the score the more likely the speaker was to use their communities dialectal features (Hudson 1996 pg 190). That is to say, if a speaker is more strongly connected to a community they are a member of they will use more markers from that community's dialect. For instance, a member of a group who is very insular and does not communicate frequently with standard dialect speakers will use more of their own community's dialect markers than a member of a community that has frequent contact with standard dialect. Milroy's theory states that the differences in gender are actually due to differences in NSS, and that the reason women use more dialectal markers is because women traditionally stay within their communities more than males, who leave their communities to work (Hudson 1996 192). Cameron proposes that the class differences in language occur because those in the working class feel more strongly connected to their community than those in the middle or upper classes, and the continuing difference between men's and women's language, now that women are increasingly leaving their communities to work, occurs because these "pink" and "blue" collar jobs, while ostensibly being both of the same class, are actually not (Cameron 1992 pg 68).

3. Features of Beijing Mandarin

As was outlined in the introductory section on Mandarin Chinese, although *Putonghua* was based on the Beijing variety, *Putonghua* and Beijing Mandarin are not necessarily the same language. While *Putonghua* is the national language that is taught to all Chinese schoolchildren,

in most areas of China other local languages such as Cantonese, Wu, Xiang, Min and so on are spoken in the home and is their mother tongue. For these speakers *Putonghua* is essentially a second language, although it is learned very early on in life. However, Beijingers can be argued to be "native speakers" of *Putonghua*, as their home language is the one that most closely matches it. The following are four features outlined by Qing Zhang that are part of the Beijing dialect yet do not appear in *Putonghua*.

a. Rhotacization

The most widely known of the Beijing Mandarin dialect features is retroflex rhotic suffixation, known as Mandarin as 儿化 *érhuà*. Some instances of *erhua* have entered the *Putonghua*, however, the use of *erhua* in *Putonghua* is drastically lower than the use in everyday Beijing vernacular. Even though Chinese script, being semanto-phonetic and not alphabetic, does not easily facilitate lexicographically marking different accents, *erhua* is easily and commonly noted in vernacular written Mandarin with the character 儿, *ér* from *érzi* 儿子, "son." This use of the character 儿 is commonly seen in everyday *erhua* phrases such as 一点儿 (*yīdiǎr,* a little bit) and 那儿 (*nǎr,* where). It is possible for all syllable finals in Mandarin to undergo rhotacization (Zhang 2008 pg 204).

In addition to meaning "son," 儿 *er* can also mean "small," giving erhua one of its nicknames, the diminutive suffix. Use of this suffix in a diminutive way can be seen in the previous example, 一点儿 *yīdiǎr, "*a little bit". However, use of this suffixation is not limited to just denoting diminution, as can be seen with the other example above, 那儿 *nǎr* "where"*,* as well as other instances such as the verb 玩儿 *wánr,* "to play or to have fun." This use of

diminution in ways not limited to just smallness is consistent with diminution's use in other languages, for example, in other languages diminution is used to denote approximation, likeness or imitation, and intensity (Jurafsky 1996 pg 536).

The basic phonological process for this change is

huā	花	$x^{w}a$:	→	$x^{w}a$ɚ (ɻ)	flower

(example from Zhang 2008 pg 406)

In this word, with no consonant final, the /ɚ/ suffix simply affixes to the word and no other change occurs. However, when the word has a final consonant it interacts in a more complicated way. There are only two legal consonant finals in Putonghua (other than ɻ) which are /n/ and /ŋ/. When /ɚ/ affixes to a word that originally had a /n/ final, the /n/ simply drops off and /ɚ/ affixes. However, when /ŋ/ is replaced by a rhotic vowel the root vowel keeps its nasality (Duanmu 2007 pg 213).

See the following examples for the different processes for nasal finals:

pán	盘	p^{h}an	→	p^{h}aɚ (ɻ)	plate
gāng	缸	kaŋ	→	kãɚ (ɻ)	vat, jar

(examples from Duanmu 2007 pg 219)

In addition, while the majority of rhotacization has no effect on the meaning of the word, there are some words that sound odd to native Beijingers without *erhua*, and there are also some words that have different meanings with and without *erhua* (Chen 1999 pg 39). Some examples:

báimiàn	白面	white flour
báimiànr	白面儿	heroin
xìn	信	letter
xìnr	信儿	message (“little letter”)

(examples from Chen 1999 pg 39)

Baimain/baimianr is most likely an example of diminution used to denote imitation or something looking like something else, as heroin looks quite like white flour. *Xin/xinr* is most likely diminution used to denote something being a smaller version of something, as a message is a small letter. Compare to an example from Ojibwa, *waasgonechgan* (normal) – *waasgonechgaas* (diminutive) for lamp – flashlight, as flashlight is something like a smaller form of a lamp (Jurafsky 1996 pg 536). However, the vast majority of *erhua* uses are not semantic but simply stylistic, and used in causal speech (Chen 1999 pg 39).

According to Zhang, amongst Chinese rhotacization is regarded to be “smooth” sounding, and is associated with the local stereotype 京油子 *Jīngyóuzi* “Beijing Smooth Operator.” (Zhang 2008 pg 201). A smooth operator is someone who is “smooth and streetwise” and speaks with 油腔滑调 *yóuqiānghuádiào* “smooth-accent slippery-tune,” meaning glib or having the gift of gab (Zhang 2005 pg 35). This local character is not explicitly gendered.

b. Interdental Fricatives

Another feature of Beijing Mandarin, younger and less well-known than *erhua*, is the change of dental sibilant initials into interdental fricatives, which occurs in the following way:

ts → tθ

ts^h → $tθ^h$

s → θ

This is a relatively simple sound change, the only variation is with the place of articulation; manner of articulation and voicing do not change.

See for example:

gōngzuò 工作 kuŋtsuo → kuŋtθuo job, work

(example from Zhang 2007 pg 407)

Zhang reports that among Chinese this sound change is heavily stigmatized, and associated with the local character of the 胡同串子 *hútòngchuànzi* or "alley saunterer," a "feckless and lazy male who wanders around the alleyways of the city waiting for something to happen" (Zhang 2007 pg 410).

c. Retroflex obstruent initial lenition

When the retroflex obstruent initials are lenited (weakened) they all merge into the retroflex approximant. Although older phonological studies claim that this sound process is stress-sensitive and occurs only in unstressed contexts (Yuen Ren Chao 1968, Jerry Norman 1988), Zhang reports that in her data she found it to occur in both stressed and stress-less situations (Zhang 2005 pg 442). This sound process occurs for the following phonemes:

tʂ

$tʂ^h$ → ɻ

ʂ

See for example:

xuésheng (unstressed)	学生	ɕyɛʂəŋ	→	ɕyɛɻəŋ	student
huāshēng (stressed)	花生	xʷaʂəŋ	→	xʷaɻəŋ	peanut

(examples from Zhang 2005 pg 442)

Zhang reports that this feature is also associated with the "Beijing Smooth Operator", but that most of her subjects, while knowing *erhua* by name, did not know the specific name for lenition (弱化 *ruòhuà*), meaning that it is less well-known than *erhua*. (Zhang 2005 pg 441).

d. Unstressed syllables and neutral tone

In Beijing Mandarin, unstressed syllables get a neutral tone. The exact tonal realization of this neutral tone is allophonic and depends on the preceding tone. The following chart is adapted from a dissertation by Zhiqiang Li (Li 2008 pg 84).

Preceding tone	**Allotonic realization of following neutral tone**	**Example**	**Gloss**
High tone (55) (˥ ˥)	2 (˧)	飞了 fēile	Flew
Rising tone (35) (˧ ˥)	3 (˨)	什么 shénme	What?
Dipping tone (214) (˨ ˩ ˧)	4 (˧)	我的 wǒde	Mine
Falling tone (51) ˥ ˩	1 (˩)	肚子 dùzi	Belly

However, other varieties of spoken Mandarin, outside of northern China, exhibit full tone in neutral tone environments. This realization of full tone is a language transference effect from non-native speakers of Mandarin, such as Cantonese, Min or Wu speakers, whose language does not regularly use neutral tones in this way (Zhang pg 407).

Take for example "student," seen earlier:

xuésheng 学生 → *xuéshēng* student

The high tone for *sheng* in *xuesheng* is the correct tone for this morpheme when it appears in stressed situations; however, this full tone is not usually realized by Beijing speakers in this word.

According to Zhang, inside northern China use of a full tone in a neutral tone environment is indicative that the speaker is non-native and non-Mainland, primarily seen in the influence of Hong Kong and Taiwan on the speech (Zhang 2007 pg 407). Beijing users of this feature, as it is not native to their language, are hypercorrecting when they use it, most likely in an attempt to sound more international.

4. Women's Usage of the Features of Beijing Mandarin

To assess the different theories of male/female language differentiation presented earlier I will be analyzing a recent study on dialect feature usage amongst native Beijing professionals by Qing Zhang. Her data set was gathered from 1997 to 1998, and records the usage frequency for the various features of Beijing Mandarin outlined previously among employees of the state and employees of international firms. According to Zhang, working for an international firm is considered in Chinese society to be more prestigious than working for the state (2007 pg 405),

therefore, for the purpose of analyzing prestige theory I will be considering the corporate employees to be higher class than the state employees.

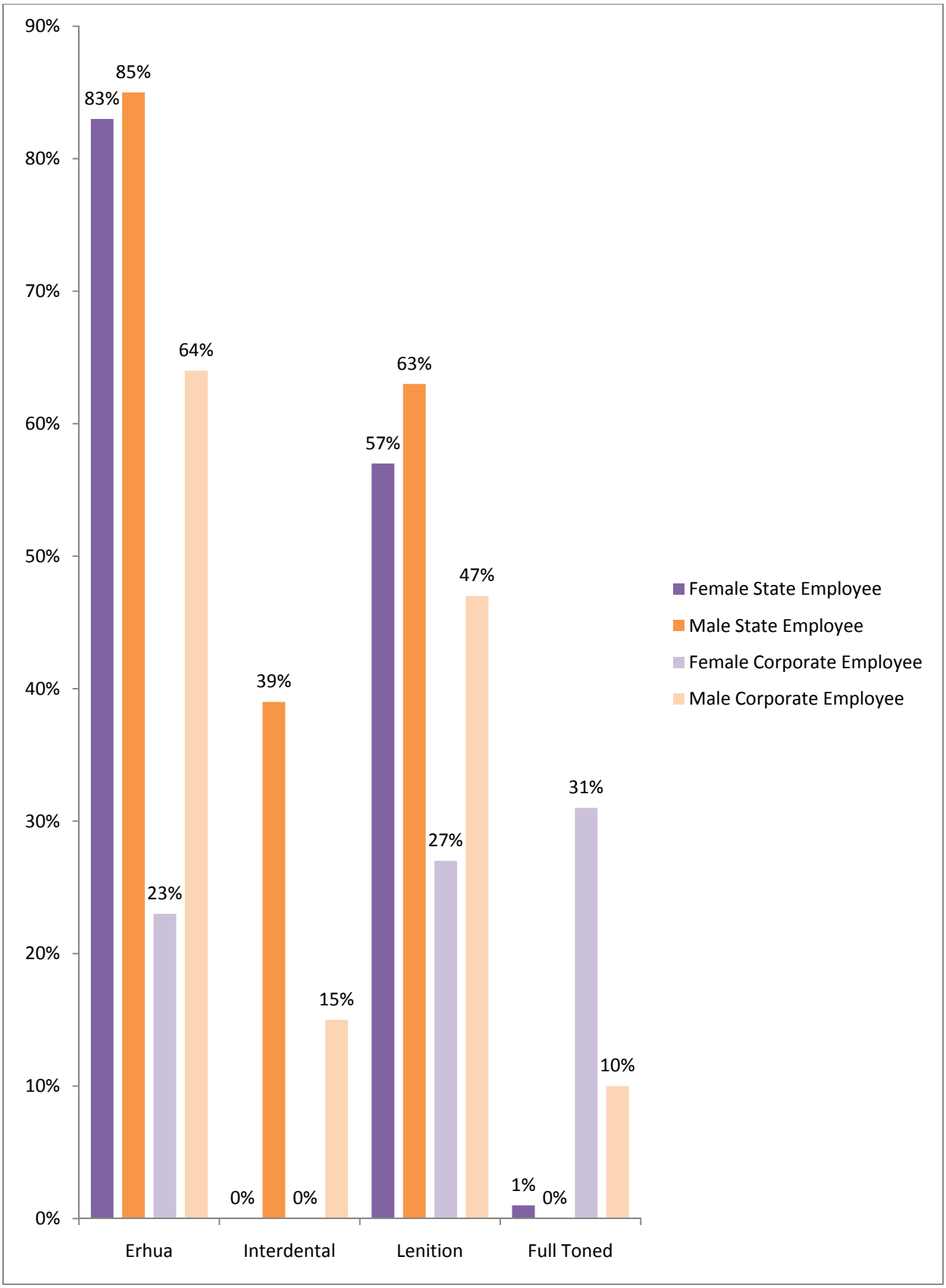
Before analyzing these four features of Beijing Mandarin in relation to prestige theory it is important to understand the role linguistic capital plays in the Chinese job market. With the majority of state employees Zhang interviewed, their jobs were assigned to them directly after college by the government (2007 pg 412). Under this system jobs are assigned regardless of gender, and it can be safely assumed that language had little to nothing to do with these job assignments.

However, with the employees working for foreign corporations, their jobs were gotten through recruitment, application and interviewing, where language skills and gender both play a role. Due to the international language needs of these foreign businesses, many of the employees interviewed were hired specifically on their foreign language abilities, particularly languages in use in other strong foreign markets such as English, German or Japanese (Zhang 2007 pg 415). In addition, Zhang observed that foreign companies were far more likely to employ attractive, soft-spoken women as receptionists, whereas state companies usually didn't have a formal receptionist at all (2007 pg 411). Among the corporately employed women she interviewed, only one had started at the company as something other than a secretary or receptionist, whereas most of the corporate men she interviewed started in "real" business jobs like sales and marketing (Zhang 2007 pg 414).

What can be inferred from these interviews is that, while people working for state companies are only working in a linguistic market where only one language has real value, *Putonghua*; people working for foreign companies are working in a linguistic market where

many languages are valued, not just *Putonghua* but also English and other foreign languages with business applications. Also, from these interviews it is apparent that, while inside of the state companies the government has achieved a large amount of gender equality; foreign companies have brought their "pink collar" attitudes about what sorts of jobs are appropriate for men and women into the country with them, with the almost completely female corps of receptionist and secretaries, traditionally female jobs in Western companies.

Here is Zhang's data, separated into four groups, corporate men, corporate women, state men and state women, with their subsequent dialectal feature usage (adapted from Zhang 2007 pg 410).


90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
83%
85%
23%
64%
0%
39%
0%
15%
57%
63%
27%
47%
1%
0%
31%
10%
Erhua
Interdental
Lenition
Full Toned
Female State Employee
Male State Employee
Female Corporate Employee
Male Corporate Employee

State-employed men and women used *erhua* almost equally (85% usage and 83% usage respectively), while corporate men were slightly less likely to use it than their state counterparts (64%), and corporate women about two thirds less likely to use it than their state counterparts (23%). Zhang's statistical analysis found that the *erhua* usage difference between state and corporately employed subjects (without considering gender) was significant, and the difference between corporate men and women was also significant, while the difference between state-employed men and women was not significant (Zhang 2005 pg 446). I think this is due to the very Beijing-native nature of *erhua*. While in a state-owned company where all the employees in the company and most everyone the employees will interact with are all local Chinese, heavy *erhua* in speech is either a neutral factor or perhaps positively associated with the "Beijing Smooth Operator" mentioned previously. However, within the foreign firms, where *Putonghua* is not the only language in use, this feature takes on more salience. It seems the lower *erhua* use amongst international firm employees, especially women, is indicative of their attempting to use a more international form of *Putonghua*. The lower use among corporate women than men is also indicative of the greater pressure put on them to act as the public face (and voice) of their company.

Women of both classes eschewed interdental fricative usage completely (0% usage), while corporate men were less than half as likely to use interdental fricatives (15%) as their state counterparts (39%). Zhang's statistical analysis found that the difference between men and women (disregarding class) was significant (Zhang 2005 pg 445). I think the disuse among all women is because of the heavy negative connotations associated this feature, which is the "alley saunterer" character mentioned previously. It can be safely inferred that women find this connotation completely unacceptable. For women this connotation is so undesirable that Zhang

goes so far as to say that a woman using this feature would probably be suspected of having "loose morals" (Zhang 2007 pg 410), making its complete avoidance understandable. However, among men this connotation does not seem to be nearly as important, although the lower rate of usage for corporate men than state men can either be explained once again as an attempt by the corporate men to sound more international, or that the state men find the "alley saunterer" connotation more desirable than corporate men.

Like *erhua*, state employees of both genders used lenition about equally (57% for women, 63% for men), while corporate men were less likely to use it (47%), and corporate women least likely to use it (27%). Zhang's statistical analysis found that the difference between state and corportate employees was significant, as was the difference between corporate men and women, but the difference between state men and women was not significant (Zhang 2005 pg 445), just like *erhua.* However, overall lenition usage was lower than that of *erhua*. Despite the overall lower usage, I believe lenition preferences can be explained in the same way as *erhua*, that is to say, it is associated with the Beijing accent over the *Putonghua*, and the less someone uses it the more international they sound.

In addition, although Zhang's paper does not discuss it, I believe avoiding lenition may be an attempt to sound less "sloppy," as lenition is typically regarded as a stylistic marker of casual speech (Labov 2001 pg 28). However, more research into Beijingers' attitudes towards lenition would be needed to test this hypothesis.

State employee usage of full tone was almost non-existent (aside from a 1% usage rate by state females), while corporate men used it a little (10%), and corporate females leading with the highest usage rate (31%). Zhang's statistical analysis found that the difference between

professional groups was significant, and that the difference between corporate men and women was significant, while the difference between state men and women was not significant (Zhang 2005 pg 445). I believe that, like the selective absence of *erhua* and lenition, absence of the native neutral tone is an attempt to sound more international. This feature also shows the strongest class difference, with it hardly appearing at all in the state employees, aside from a 1% usage in women.

5. Conclusions

I believe the above data shows strong support for Labov's prestige theory of language change. The data shows a strong difference between both classes and genders, with higher class women showing a very strong and very consistent selection of prestigious language. Labov also states that "upward social mobility appears to be a primary characteristic of leaders of linguistic change" (Labov 2001 pg 509), and these corporately-employed Chinese women definitely fit into that group.

Referring back to Labov's Principles, the patterns of use for unstressed full tones indicate that they are undergoing change from the top, that is to say originating in the upper classes and working their way down. However, it is yet unclear as to if this feature is undergoing change or is simply in stable variation, and more diachronic data of its usage would be needed to determine if this is true. At first glance, if *erhua* and lenition are taken to be emerging forms, it appears that they do not follow the patterns predicted by Labov. However, as they are both well-established as part of the Beijing accent, *erhua* having been observed by linguists as far back as 1927 (Duanmu 2007 pg 214), I think that their disuse is actually the novel form in this case, and that the international-style *Putonghua* form is exerting pressure on native Beijingers to not use them

if they wish to sound prestigious. If this is taken to be the case, emerging *erhua* and lenition disuse follows Labov's principles very well.

Interdental fricatives, however, do not appear to follow Labov's principles, as they are novel yet do not show up in women at all, where Labov's second principle would predict that women would be using them the most. However, I think this may be an issue of the interaction of class and gender. Zhang's study does have any data from the working class or the underclass, and I predict that were usage rates to be tested amongst these people, women from these classes would possibly use interdental fricatives more than men of their same class. However, there is the possibility that the negative connotations for this feature are so strong that women simply will not use it, regardless of how novel it is.

In addition, interdental fricative usage among males is very well predicted by Trudgill's prestige/covert prestige theory. While women find the "alley saunterer" connotation undesirable, there may be some men, or some times when some men find this association a positive one.

I do not find that Lesley Milroy's community-ties theory predicts the language situation in Beijing very well. While it could be argued that the foreign-company atmosphere, in which the employees would spend a lot of time with various different nationalities and non-local Chinese, would provide less Beijing community involvement for the employees, and that the state companies, employing exclusively Chinese and interacting with predominately Chinese, would provide a much stronger Beijing community for its employees, I still do not feel this fully accounts for why corporate women would use such different language than any other group studied. Why would corporately-employed women feel less community involvement than their male peers? The women, due to the frequently foreign language focus of their employment,

might have more contact with non-Beijingers than males, but I do not think this fully accounts for the differences in language usage.

In addition, as far back as 1974 it was observed by an American Linguistics Delegation visiting the People's Republic of China, that the only people who appeared to have mastered the standard pronunciation of *Putonghua* were "some university professors, some female high school teachers of Chinese, and female tour guides at museums and exhibition halls" (Chan 2000 pg 4). In addition, those who had the worst pronunciation of *Putonghua* were young men with high positions in the government (Chan 2000 pg 4). The female high school teachers and tour guides would have a very clear pressure put on them to conform to the standard pronunciation as well as possible, as it would be such an important part of excelling in their jobs. The men, however, comfortable in their status and power, would feel no need to change their language to gain more; in addition, there may have been covert prestige to be gained by appearing not to care about how one speaks (Chan 2000 pg 4). *Putonghua* has a long history of being a prestige variety.

I think that the simplest explanation for the class and gender differences in Beijingers is the best one; that corporately-employed women have the most pressure put on them to sound prestigious, and therefore use the highest level of prestigious language. The other groups studied, the state employees and the corporate men, are judged more on their business skills than their language skills, whereas the corporate women, with their disproportionate representation as secretaries and foreign language specialists outlined previously, are judged heavily on their speech. This study shows how one specific group of Chinese women strategically alter their language to change how people perceive them and thus gain power.

III. Politeness

1. Introduction to Politeness Theory

The study of politeness is primarily concerned with how people negotiate social interactions in a way that maintains or affirms the social standing of everyone involved. The bulk of politeness theory comes from the work of Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson in the late seventies, but there are also many recent criticisms of their work.

One of the key concepts in politeness theory is that of "face." This term is actually Chinese in origin, coming from the words 脸 *liǎn*, 面 *miàn*, and 颜 *yán* which all mean both one's literal face and one's reputation. The meanings of *lian* and *mian* are slightly different, with *lian* being closer to one's good standing in society, and something that is ascribed to someone by others, and *mian* being closer to reputation or prestige, and something one actively seeks (Mills 2003 pg 77). However, the meanings both concern how others perceive someone. "Face" also shows up in a variety of Chinese expressions, like 不要脸 *bùyàoliǎn*, literally translated "not wanting face" but meaning "shameless;" 没脸 *méiliǎn*, literally translated "no face" but meaning "ashamed or embarrassed;" 有脸 *yǒuliǎn,* literally translated "having face" but meaning "having a good standing," and also meaning "having the gall (to do something);" and 颜面扫地 *yánmiànsǎodì* literally translated "having one's face sweep the dirt," which is an idiom meaning that one has been thoroughly discredited. In linguistics, "face" can be defined somewhat more broadly; as stated by Brown and Levinson face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" and "…something that is emotionally invested, and can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. (Brown and Levinson

1987 pg 61).” In addition, there are two types of face: negative and positive. Negative face is the need every person has to feel autonomous and in control of their own destiny, and positive face is the need every person feels for others to like them (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 62).

In the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson, politeness is primarily concerned with dealing with “face threatening acts,” which is any act that threatens the social standing of the listener or the speaker. Face threatening acts (FTAs) are of two separate types: negative and positive. Negative FTAs are acts that put either the speaker or the listener under the power of the other. FTAs that damage the negative face of the hearer would be commands, requests, advice, and threats; but also compliments, offers, and promises (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 66). FTAs that damage the negative face of the speaker are expressions of thanks, apologies, excuses and accepting offers (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 67). Positive FTAs are acts that undermine the social bond between speaker and listener. FTAs that damage the positive face of the listener are insults, corrections, disagreements, interruptions or shows of disrespect (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 66). FTAs that damage the positive face of the speaker include apologies, confessions and acceptances of compliments (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 68).

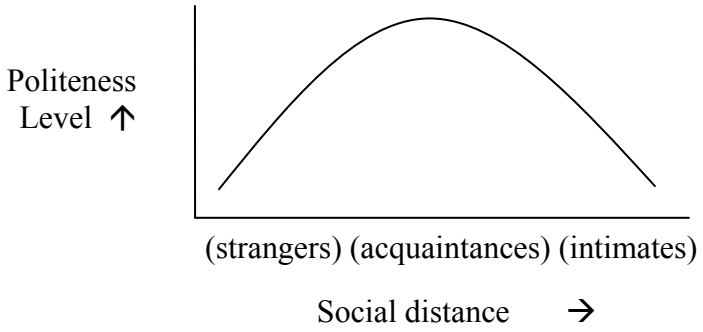
Brown and Levinson also outline a way to determine the “weightiness” of the FTA, which speakers use to determine the appropriate level of politeness that must be used to counteract it. This formula is weightiness = power the hearer holds over the speaker + social distance between speaker and hearer + rank of imposition, or seriousness of the imposition within the hearer and speaker’s culture (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 76). This formula is shortened as $w = d + p + r$.

Under Brown and Levinson's politeness theories, there are four verbal types of politeness strategies (as well as one non-verbal strategy: silence): bald, which would be direct commands without any politeness; positive politeness, which includes shows of interest or concern for the listener and methods for making the listener feel valued and liked; negative politeness, which include hedging, tag questions, softening and apologies; and finally off-record indirectness, which would be ways of suggesting one's needs without actually making a request, such as stating "Boy, it's getting warm in here" instead of asking the person to turn on a fan (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 70).

One criticism of Brown and Levinson's politeness theories is that it implicitly assumes that politeness is a "good" thing, and used primarily out of niceness and respect for the other party, while one can certainly be duplicitous while maintaining politeness. There is no place for accessing sincerity in Brown and Levinson's theory (Mills 2003 pg 60). Another criticism is their sometimes bizarre definition of what is "face-threatening." For instance, simple requests like "pass the potatoes" would be classified a face-threatening act, while arguably they are not (Mills 2003 pg 60). About this Sara Mills says "If such acts are considered to be FTAs, then the view of society is a particularly negative one," and further calls this view "Anglocentric," citing other cultures which permit more direct requests between strangers (Mills 2003 pg 60). In addition, this politeness theory does not take into account many of the non-verbal aspects of social behavior that overlap with linguistic politeness, such as etiquette (Mills 2003 pg 60).

Across cultures, the largest predictor of politeness strategy used is the relative social distance between speakers (Holmes 1995 pg 11). For instance, lower or no politeness features may be observed between family members, whereas a person talking to their boss would probably show greatly elevated politeness. There is also Nessa Wolfson's "bulge" model of

politeness, which predicts that the greatest levels of politeness would exist between acquaintances, while the lowest levels would be between both intimates and strangers (Holmes 1995 pg 13). Drawn below:



Social stratification is indeed an important predictor in Chinese culture of politeness strategy, with different politeness strategies in use between strangers, friends and family (Pan 2000 pg 28).

Politeness strategies not only vary across cultures, but also vary between men and women. In most cultures women are perceived to be more polite than men, but this is contested (Mills 2003 pg 207). However, some general patterns of difference between men's and women's politeness use do exist. For example, women use more elicitative questions during conversations (Holmes 1995 pg 39), more supportive elicitations (or expressions of agreement) (Holmes 1995 pg 46), women use more hedging, softening and intensifying words (Holmes 1995 pg 73), men interrupt speakers more while women overlap with speakers more (Holmes 1995 pg 50), and women both apologize and accept apologies more frequently than men (Holmes 1995 pg 185). It is both these general observations of gender differences and the overarching politeness theory which I will analyze within Chinese culture.

2. Chinese Politeness

Yuling Pan believes Chinese politeness is largely a matter of insider/outsider distinction in personal relationships. Insiders would be friends, family, relatives, as well as people from your workplace, town, or school (Pan 2000 pg 41). While insiders usually merit extensive facework during conversations, interactions with strangers are typically stripped of this. For example, in his book, he contrasts how a salesperson at a government-owned stamp store talked with her personal insiders versus outsiders: when the salesperson sold something to a stranger she did not greet them, and only answered their direct questions or gave them what they asked for (Pan 2000 pg 35), however, when an old school friend and her daughter came in, there was a quick exchange of small-talk before any stamps were sold (Pan 2000 pg 42). However, with the rise of small family businesses in China in the 1980s, the idea of "customer service" became more important, and salespeople in family-owned businesses can be observed to use more politeness towards customers than those in state-owned businesses (Pan 2000 pg 54). Pan believes this is because salespeople in family businesses see all customers as insiders, as they are potential loyal customers.

In addition to the insider/outside distinction, there is a different set of politeness strategies in use in intimate family situations. Chinese family life is highly hierarchical by age and gender. Although, as outlined previously, in the last 60 years women in China have made great progress in the realm of politics and work, this progress is not completely echoed in the home (Pan 2000 pg 107). The hierarchy of Chinese family life still goes from oldest male to youngest male, and then from oldest female to youngest female (Pan 2000 pg 106). In general, it is considered to be more polite to make bald requests or commands to family members than hedging questions, as excessive politeness features would imply distance between hearer and speaker (Pan 2000 pg

111). However, requests and commands can only go from higher to lower-ranking family members, not in the other direction.

The insider/outsider distinction is the greatest predictor of how Chinese women will talk to their social equals, that is to say other women of the same age. The following is an excerpt from a conversation involving two friends and a saleswoman at a privately-owned clothing store. One friend (Lanlan) is a frequent customer at the store and therefore has a rapport with the saleswoman, while the other friend (Nanying) does not. Everyone in the conversation is bilingual in Cantonese and Mandarin, but the conversation occurs in a Cantonese-speaking area, so the saleswoman speaks in Cantonese, but the friends speak to each other in Mandarin.

> Saleswoman: (Cantonese) I'm just thinking that you are so… Well, you know me well, so I'll give you a discount. Even now I just sold it for eight-five dollars.
>
> Nanying: (to Lanlan) (Mandarin) This is mine.
>
> Saleswoman: (Cantonese) Just because I think you, you are all my friends so I don't mind… Anyway, I also, now, I can give you a two dollar discount.
>
> Lanlan: (Cantonese) Show me that blouse.
>
> Saleswoman: (Cantonese) Okay.
>
> Nanying: (to Lanlan) (Mandarin) Should I buy it or not?
>
> Saleswoman: (Cantonese) Okay, I'll give you a discount too. Really, I am only doing this as a favor to my sister-in-law. *[Sister-in-law is not literal in this case, but is a kinship term to show friendship]*

(quoted from Pan 2000 pg 69-70).

The saleswoman is using linguistic strategies to build a connection between her and the customers in order to make the sale. She emphasizes friendship as the basis of giving a discount, and uses as kinship term to refer to Nanying as well. She hopes that her friendly feelings will entice the women to purchase, which it eventually did. Also, in an earlier conversation, the saleswoman code-switched to Mandarin (although she is a native Cantonese speaker and Mandarin is her second language) when talking to Nanying to help build a connection to her (Pan 2000 pg 62). These are all strong examples of not just insider talk, but also show insider talk used as a tool not only between two friends, but strategically used by one person, the saleswoman, to help construct a connection between her and a potential customer that does not yet exist.

3. Chinese Women's Politeness in Family Life

As covered previously, although outside of the home women's status is ostensibly equal to men's, inside the home that is not the case, and this gendered difference is very much reflected in the politeness strategies used by both men and women. Traditional Chinese familial hierarchy is still the greatest determiner of how men and women interact within the home. Below is an excerpt from a family conversation in which men and women of different rank negotiate drinking some wine.

Dahua: Son in law, second oldest, highest ranking

Liping: Mother, oldest, second highest ranking

Lanlan: Daughter, youngest, lowest ranking

Liping: Do you want a drink?

Dahua: Well, what do you have?

Liping: I have wine.

Dahua: It's not open yet, not open yet.

Liping: Oh it's open. The foreign wine's open.

Dahua: The foreign wine then.

Liping: (to Lanlan) Okay, that bottle.

Dahua: (to Lanlan) Get a cup.

(Lanlan gets the wine and the cup without speaking)

(quoted from Pan 2000 pg 109-110)

Dahua initially refuses the wine because in Chinese culture an offer must be refused the first time it is made to verify if the offer is genuine; if it is, it will be offered again. Only after the offer is rejected three times will the person making the offer know it is actually not wanted, which is why Liping (who is the host) keeps offering it (Pan 2000 pg 110). However, Lanlan's behavior is the most interesting in terms of women's status. Both her husband and her mother give her a bald command, and she enacts it without speaking.

In general, in Chinese family life, when positive politeness is used it will be elaborated, such as Liping's insistence on offering Dahua the wine, but when negative face-threatening-acts are used they will be bald, such as Dahua's and Liping's commands to Lanlan (Pan 2000 pg

111). As stated previously, the primary purpose of negative politeness (such as hedging) is to respect the autonomy of the listener, but in Chinese family life, respecting the listener's autonomy would go against the collectiveness of the family unit (Pan 2000 pg 111). Being too polite to Lanlan, in this case, would distance her from them and imply that she is not part of the family, so the commands are bald.

Contrast these bald commands with a situation in which Lanlan makes a request to Jianxin, her younger brother, who is going to Sanshui tomorrow. Although she is older than him, in the family structure he still outranks her.

> Lanlan: Would it be okay if you bought me a bag tomorrow?
>
> Jianxin: No, I won't. You don't know what you want.
>
> Liping: What kind of bag? A handbag?
>
> Dahua: He could buy anything else for you. But nobody can buy a handbag for you.
>
> Jianxin: There is no way I can buy it for you.
>
> Dahua: Yeah, you definitely have to buy a handbag yourself.
>
> (quoted from Pan 2000 pg 127 – 128)

Lanlan frames her question with hedging, not wanting to infringe on her brother's autonomy. However, Jianxin rejects her request baldly with no excuse or apology, and her husband joins in to support his rejection. To support her daughter, Liping suggests that Jianxin buy his sister a sweater instead, but he refuses this also (Pan 2000 pg 129). In general, men's

opinions and suggestions are well supported by everyone, while women's contributions are minimized or ignored (Pan 2000 pg 129), and in this case, the woman, Lanlan, does not bother to defend her request at all.

This general policy of supporting men's contributions and downplaying women's can be seen in conflict talk as well. The following excerpt is from a conflict talk in which Lanlan tries to explain that they should be cautious about buying canned fish because she saw on the news that some of it is counterfeit, that is to say the brand label on the can is not who actually manufactured it.

Lanlan: I saw on TV that, except for Guangzhou, all the places listed, like Sunde, Guizhou, it's very likely…

Liping: Fake stuff?

Lanlan: Yeah.

Jianxin: The stuff from Guizhou is fake, but this fish isn't.

Lanlan: Um… (expressing doubt)

Jianxin: This canned food factory is owned by the state.

Dahua: If it can use the brand name of Zhujiang…

Jianxin: Then it's real.

Dahua: Then it's real.

[…]

Lanlan: No, but that day the TV said…

Liping: Even the brand label can be fake.

Jianxin: There was a special program on TV telling people which factories use fake brand labels. […] The other day, when I bought this fish, I paid special attention to see if it was fake.

Liping: Don't worry, just steam it. It's still better than cooking it yourself.

(quoted from Pan 2000 pg 131-133)

There is strong gender solidarity in this conversation, with the two men pairing up to dispute Lanlan's concerns, and Liping supporting her daughter, but then also being the one to diffuse the argument. Liping overlaps some of Lanlan's speech, showing support, while Dahua directly echos one of Jianxin's statements, also showing support. However, when the conversation gets too heated, Liping is the one to diffuse it. Lanlan then immediately stops defending her position, because the topic has been dismissed.

Showing familial solidarity is highly valued, so highly valued that during one of the conversations, which all members of the family know are being recorded (although the researcher is not present), one of the family members reminds them all that they are being recorded and they stop bickering immediately (Pan 2000 pg 137), not wanting to appear to be discordant on record. According to Confucianism, conflict arises when people do not properly consider their duties to others, and, conversely, if everyone in society follows the duty of their roles, then there will be harmony (Yao 2000 pg 179). Confucianism places the structure of

family as the basis for society as a whole, and therefore puts special emphasis on harmony within the family (Yao 2000 pg 181).

There are three types of familial relationships within Confucianism: parent/child, husband/wife, and older/younger, and within these roles it is the duty of the inferior person to maintain peace (Yao 2000 pg 181), so that if a conflict arises they will be the first to apologize and seek amends, or in the case of Lanlan above, just let it drop.

4. Chinese Women's Politeness in Business

While traditional social rank, such as age, family status and gender, is the greatest factor determining appropriate politeness strategy in Chinese society, inside of business this is not the case, and instead it is institutionalized hierarchy that determines politeness strategies used. While governmental hierarchy has existed in China for over a thousand years, hierarchy took on new importance after the Cultural Revolution in 1949. Two separate salary grade systems were created, the cadre system and the worker system, effectively creating two separate groups of people in China (Pan 2000 pg 79). The worker salary grade system applied to people working in factories, while the cadre system applied to people in government positions, as well as people in institutions such as hospitals, schools, and banks (Pan 2000 pg 79). Those in the cadre system had a much higher status than those on the worker system, and were ranked from 1 – 26, with 1 being the highest pay grade. Prior to the re-opening of China in 1979, this official rank was the most salient way of deciding a person's social status; after 1979 a person's income became more important, but official rank is still very critical (Pan 2000 pg 79).

Inside of business, official rank supersedes all other forms of social rank such as age and gender. For example, while it would be unacceptable for a younger person to direct commands to

an older person in social or family settings, if a younger person outranks an older person in the company's hierarchy, they will give bald commands to inferiors regardless of age (Pan 1995 pg 467). However, when requests are made to hierarchical superiors, hedges are used (Pan 1995 pg 469).

With women, institutionalized hierarchy gives them the same power: where in social and family settings women cannot give bald commands to men, in business women can and do give commands or bald contradictions to men. Here is an excerpt from a conflict conversation in which there are five people of different ranks, ages and genders. They are discussing what prize to buy for a work contest. The five speakers in this conversation are, in descending rank:

Lao: Male, 34. Highest ranking. (5)

Fan: Male, 28. Second highest ranking. (4)

Tai: Male, 30. Third highest ranking. (3)

Lili: Female, 28. Lowest ranking. (1)

Rong: Male, 30. Lowest ranking. (1)

Tai (3): Let's buy some New Year's cards.

Lao (5): That's no good.

Lili (1): Those are only a dollar each! Those New Year's cards are really ugly, only one dollar.

Tai (3): Well some New Year's cards are over ten dollars each.

Lili (1): Just over a dollar.

Lao (5): No good.

[…]

Fan (4): If we have to buy something, buy desk calendars then.

Lili (1): Lots of people already have desk calendars. Many people send desk calendars to each other as gifts. What's the use of having so many? People have too many calendars.

Rong (1): Yeah, I have many, many calendars.

Lili (1): People have too many calendars.

Lao (5): It's still okay to buy desk calendars.

Lili (1): But at this time of the year many people send each other calendars.

Tai (3): It would also be okay to buy some handicraft items. Yes, handicraft items.

Lili (1): Handicraft items for those leaders! How could we give them handicraft items? Really…

[…]

(quoted from Pan 2000 pg 91 – 95)

While in home life, Lili would not express disagreement with those outranking her, here in a work situation she does, disagreeing with Lao, the highest ranking person in the

conversation, as well as Fan and Tai, who also outrank her. However, she never baldly states her opinion, but only indirectly gives her opinion by giving reasons against something. This is a typical Chinese method of arguing politely (Fan 2000 pg 96), and also forces others to argue with her reasons instead of her opinions. Her equal-rank person in the conversation, Rong, only ever supports others ideas, including hers, and never gives his own, making her actually more assertive than him in this conversation despite being female and younger than him. While Pan does not comment on this interesting occurrence, I think it may be because, as a woman, Lili feels less secure in her position than a comparable male and that she has more to prove. However, this is speculative, and more information would be needed to say exactly why Lili behaves this way. The highest ranking person, Lao, rejects ideas baldly with no facework.

It could be easy to infer that women, were they in the highest ranking position in an argument, would behave in the same way as Lao, but when Pan conducted his study there were no women in the highest ranking positions, making a study of their behavior in that role impossible.

There also exists in Chinese business, stemming from the traditional Confucian attitudes about the appropriate roles in ruler/ruled relationships, the notion of "up" and "down" talk. "Up" talk would be how subordinates (the ruled) talk to their superiors: with respect and deference, or an independence strategy, respecting their listener's autonomy and power (Pan 2000 pg 98). "Down" talk would be how superiors address their subordinates: with casualness and rapport, or a interdependence strategy, not respecting the listener's autonomy but instead emphasizing how he is part of the speaker's group (Pan 2000 pg 98). Within Confucianism, any political setting is considered an extension of the family unit, where the rulers are like parents and the ruled are like children (Yao 2000 pg 184), and the duties of these roles are very similar.

5. Conclusions about Chinese Women's Politeness

Women in modern Chinese society wear many hats, and this is reflected in their politeness strategies. While at home the traditional Confucian roles are still in effect, at work and in business their official rank allows women to be more assertive. However, there still also exists a Confucian influence on the modern politeness strategies of business and governmental rank. In this case it is the traditional dichotomy of ruler-ruled that determines what appropriately polite behavior is for both parties. It can be said, therefore, that prior to equalities brought about by the CCP in the 1950s Chinese women could only occupy one role of society, that of a woman, whereas after their legal equality they could also occupy another role, that of a worker. However, this role is only valid outside of the home; inside of the home their roles appear to be virtually unchanged. That being said, I think that as time goes on, and more successive generations of Chinese women are born into legal equality, the absolute importance of gender in the politics of home life will begin to fade.

There are many elements of Chinese politeness that are different from politeness in Western society. Take for instance Lanlan's treatment at home, which while acceptable to her, would be very rude in a Western family. I think this largely comes down to the differences between collectivist and individualist cultures. In a collectivist culture, group involvement and acceptance are valued highest, whereas in an individualist culture autonomy and personal independence are most important. Consider the formula $w = p + d + r$ outlined earlier. With the bald commands to Lanlan, the power she holds over her higher ranking family members is nil, the distance between hearer and speaker is also very low or zero, and the rank of the imposition of the request to get some cups is also quite low, so the overall weightiness of the FTA is very low, and so the speakers do not use any politeness strategies. Were a politeness strategy to be

used, Lanlan might interpret it as a family member raising the value of the distance variable in this equation, and therefore purposefully distancing himself from her, which she would find hurtful. However, if this same request were to occur in a Western context there would be a noticeable politeness strategy in use. We could assume that the power and distance variables would be the same, so the change in weight of the FTA would be due to a change in relative rank of the imposition, because an infringement on another person's autonomy is more serious within Western culture.

Contrast this to the reverse situation, when Lanlan makes a request to her brother, where she uses hedges to frame her question. We can assume the variable of distance has not changed, but the power distance variable is much higher, as her brother outranks her in family hierarchy. Also, I think the rank of the imposition is higher in this case, as grabbing some cups off the shelf is much less work than buying a purse for someone. Therefore the weight of this FTA is much higher, and Lanlan must use politeness strategies.

At first Lili's behavior in the business conflict talk seems puzzling, as she states her contradictions to her superiors quite baldly, with no hedges. However, I think there is possibly a different negative face strategy at work in this situation, the strategy of impersonalizing speaker and hearer. In the business conflict conversation above, Lili noticeably never uses "I" or "me," but she does use "we" and "people" to make general statements. This avoidance of singular personal pronouns as a form of politeness is noted by Brown and Levinson (1987 pg 190), and I think therefore that there is a negative politeness strategy at work in this situation, just a different one than would be expected in Western society.

I do not feel that Brown and Levinson's politeness theories fully account for Chinese politeness, in that implicit in their argument is that negative face is more important to the listener than positive face. Within their theory, positive facework is used primarily as a method to counter negative FTAs, while the best method for countering positive FTAs, such as insults and contradictions, is simply to avoid them. However, in Chinese culture it seems that positive face is the more important face, and that the negative face of the speaker will be sacrificed in order to preserve positive face, as best seen with the bald commands to Lanlan.

Social distance framework, however, is very much visible in Chinese politeness, with the "bulge" model being readily apparent. The most politeness can be seen between those who have a relationship but are not intimate, with the lowest levels of politeness shown to strangers. However, while on the surface level Chinese family life seems very impolite, for instance Lanlan getting bald commands from both her mother and husband, there is still a complex undercurrent of hierarchy and familial duty that determines what speech is appropriate and inappropriate for everyone in the family. Lanlan hedges towards her brother in a way that clearly and conventionally respects his negative face, however, her brother, husband and mother all direct commands and rebukes to her without any facework. However, as explained earlier, were they to do otherwise it would be hurtful, and would damage her positive face.

In addition to these theories of politeness, I believe Chinese politeness is almost inseparable from Confucianism. While women are amongst equals, as seen in the dialogue with the saleswoman and her two customers, this is not at work, but whenever there is any sort of power inequality the Confucian roles will come into play, within both workplace dynamics and family life. In the home, women occupy their traditional role of women within Confucian philosophy, ranking lower than men and also by relative age, but within the business world

official rank determines if one is the ruler or the ruled, and age and gender are apparently not in play.

It is clear from these dialogues and general patterns of politeness that Chinese women strategically alter their politeness methods and behavior to suit the needs of their situation. While amongst equals, women will use the markers of insider relations to gain power, while in business situations they will draw on the power of their rank to assert their opinions and get what they want, and within the home they will take the submissive role, because there is more power to be gained in familial unity than there is to be gained in individualism.

IV. Covert Power: Sajiao

1. Introduction to Sajiao

As previously outlined in the Politeness section, in Chinese family life, requests can only go from a higher ranking family member to a lower ranking one, and not the other way around. This creates some difficulties for the lower ranking family members: how can they get their listeners to do what they want while still maintaining their respective roles? When a lower ranking family member needs to make a request to a higher ranking one, there is one strategy that may be used, called 撒娇 *sājiāo*.

Sajiao is composed of both verbal and non-verbal cues; it is an affectation of coquettishness, weakness and pouting used by a woman to entice a man into doing what she wants. It is also used by young children of both genders towards parents for the same purpose, although boys stop using sajiao at a much younger age (Farris 1994 pg 18). Girls generally use it from a very early age and stop using it after they get married and grow older (Farris 1994 pg 18). Although this sort of petulant, feminine wheedling definitely exists in Western society, there is no one-word English translation, nor as it nearly as prevalent and accepted as it is in Chinese culture.

Sajiao is marked linguistically by several features, such as lengthened vowels, more nasality, and a greater use of the softening sentence-final particles like 嘛 *ma*, 呀 *ya*, and 吧 *ba* (Chan 2000 pg 6)**.** In addition, consonants are softened; shorter than usual and with less aspiration (Chan 2000 pg 6). Sajiao is also marked by physical signs like pursing lips, stomping feet and rolled eyes (Farris 1994 pg 16).

Sajiao is primarily used within the home towards family members. One of Catherine Farris's informants warned her thirteen-year-old daughter not to *sajiao* people she doesn't know well, or do it in public (Farris 2000 pg 18). In contrast, when the seven-year-old son of a different informant wheedled his mother to give him a piggyback ride at home the mother gave in, laughing and commenting to the researcher, "*Sajiao*!(Farris 2000 pg 18)" From an early age children are taught, both directly and indirectly, when and where *sajiao* is appropriate. However, *sajiao* gets used towards non-family members as well. Farris observed a female college student *sajiao* her female professor in order to get her to open up another seat for a full class, which the professor did. The professor later commented that students of both genders frequently *sajiao* her, but she only finds it appropriate from female students (Farris 2000 pg 25). Although *sajiao* occurs in these varied contexts, my paper is concerned primarily with how and why women use *sajiao* towards men within romantic relationships.

Sajiao has high metalinguistic value for Chinese. While in Western society a woman may consciously act childish to manipulate someone, were she to try to tell a friend about it she would struggle to convey her meaning without a lot of explanation. However, when Farris conducted her research, the single word *sajiao* instantly told all of her research subjects what she was talking about (Farris 2000 pg 13). Chinese men and women are both very much aware of what *sajiao* is and can talk about it at length. With this knowledge it can therefore be safely inferred that Chinese men know that when a woman uses *sajiao* they are being manipulated, but do not mind, and in fact, actively prefer it to normal requests.

Attitudes towards *sajiao* are generally positive. Farris reports that men liked when a woman could "naturally" *sajiao*, but a deliberate or very affected *sajiao* was undesirable (Farris 2000 pg 17). *Sajiao* is seen as a natural part of a female demeanor, it is an expected part of

male/female dynamics. One *China Daily* columnist actually goes so far as to blame *sajiao* for why many relationships between Chinese men and American women don't last: "I've heard many explanations as to why Chinese men largely fail to pick up a Western girl; everything from media stereotypes to the fact that Chinese men are somehow less aggressive and confident […] I think it's because they ignore the fact that foreign women don't *sajiao*. They don't put on the cute whiny face and play the weaker sex. […] For a man that is used to and expects *sajiao* this can be quite a rude awakening!" (Christian, 2010)

Unlike in Chinese society, Western men's attitudes towards *sajiao* are not positive. In a discussion on a web forum for American husbands of Chinese women, a poster describes *sajiao* as "complaining almost nonsensically about something she said she wanted" and "putting me in a no-win situation, almost like she's looking to cause trouble, making something of nothing" (Mafan 2007). Among these forum posters *sajiao* is not considered a normal marker of femininity, but instead an irritating cultural difference that must be tolerated, or a marital problem that needs to be solved. One poster jokes: "[…] we do have an English translation. We call it PMS" (Rodger 2007).

Sajiao is intrinsic to Chinese relationship dynamics, but it is also something that clearly loses its power when attempted outside of Chinese culture. The question then arises, how can *sajiao* be so effective and accepted within Chinese culture, but completely ineffective outside of it?

2. Sajiao and Confucianism

I believe *sajiao* can be understood through traditional Confucian roles. When a woman *sajiaos*, she is making herself seem younger and smaller, weaker, essentially putting herself in

the role of child or wife, or an inferior role in the core Confucian dichotomy of superior/inferior. The man she is *sajiao*ing, therefore, is placed into the role of adult, husband or general superior. While someone within an inferior role has the duty to be deferent and obedient, the person in the superior role also has responsibilities towards their inferiors. For instance, while children have the duty to maintain harmony with their parents, parents have the duty to give their children a proper upbringing and education (Yao 2000 pg 182). Also, while the ruled must submit to the authority of their rulers, rulers have the duty to their subjects to be fair and benevolent, and to provide for their moral and physical well-being (Yao 2000 184). When a woman *sajiaos* a man, she is placing him into the superior role, trying to evoke in him these same dutiful feelings.

When a man is in this superior role he has the duty to take care of her, and therefore to refuse the requests of the *sajiao*ing woman would be to violate this duty. Essentially, the woman is not only removing his ability to refuse her based on the logical fairness or unfairness of the request, but she is also moving the request away from being an issue of his autonomy and independence. Were a woman to make a bald request to a man, if he were to follow it he would be placing himself in the inferior role, which he would find distasteful. However, when a woman uses *sajiao* to make a request, a man has been placed into the superior role, so if he does what she asks he is not being imposed upon, instead he is the benevolent benefactor, giving her what she needs of his own free will, but also because it is his duty to do so. It becomes not an order, but a self-driven fulfillment of his role.

Sajiao is a way for Chinese women to get Chinese men to do what they want in a win/win situation. Without *sajiao* a woman is unable to make requests of a boyfriend or husband without violating her Confucian role, but with it she is. Without *sajiao* her boyfriend or husband is

unable to enact her requests without effectively emasculating himself, but with it he can do what she wants while maintaining his role as her superior.

3. Sajiao as a form of politeness

In addition to being a function of Confucianism, I believe that *sajiao* is a form of politeness within Chinese culture, and can be analyzed within the facework theory of Brown and Levinson.

When a woman *sajiaos*, in addition to exploiting Confucian roles, she is also addressing the positive face of the man she is *sajiao*ing. As outlined by Brown and Levinson, asking someone to do something is a negative FTA, as it is obliging them to do what you want and eroding their autonomy. The woman who makes a request of a man is threatening the man's negative face. However, in order to counteract this negative FTA, she uses a positive face building strategy, *sajiao.* While, on the surface, acting like a spoiled child and making demands seems quite rude, *sajiao* is actually a positive-politeness strategy because the woman is consciously trying to make the man feel needed and depended on as well superior, or build his positive face, in order to make him want to please her.

Brown and Levinson do outline some examples of phonology and prosody shifts within conversations to signify intimacy and friendship in other languages, such as Basque, and labels these as positive-politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 267). Furthermore, they state that high-pitch speech has "natural" connotations with the speech of children, and use of this feature by an adult is deferential to the listener and is a form of negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987 pg 268). However, I believe that *sajiao* can be clearly shown to be a positive politeness, as it builds the face of the listener. While the fact that *sajiao* occurs concurrent with a

negative FTA does make it a negative politeness strategy, classifying it just as this it does not completely encompass all the work that *sajiao* does for both speaker and hearer. While I do believe *sajiao* is definitely applicable under face-based politeness theory, the existing framework, with a clear-cut distinction between negative and positive politeness acts, cannot fully account for it. *Sajiao* is simultaneously positive and negative politeness.

4. Conclusions about Sajiao

Sajiao is a way for women in Chinese society to gain covert power over men. While there are restrictions on what is appropriate behavior for a woman within family and intimate life in Chinese culture, there are also traditional Confucian duties and expectations on the man that she can exploit to her favor. Chinese women could choose to leave their traditional roles entirely, to draw on their increased status in modern Chinese society in order to baldly tell a man what to do, as he does to her, but there are many disadvantages to doing this, primarily making the man upset and defensive, and therefore less likely to do what she wants. *Sajiao,* however, works within the existing cultural framework, and has no negative fallout as breaking it does. On the contrary, *sajiao* actually does positive facework for the listener, making him feel needed and depended on, as well as superior. *Sajiao* is does considerable facework for both male listener and female speaker.

Furthermore, in addition to being a function of Confucianism, *sajiao* is also applicable as a strategy of positive politeness. *Sajiao's* power is derived from its ability to make the male hearer feel important, needed, and superior, making it a positive-face building strategy. And, as it typically accompanies a specific FTA act, it is method a pairing a negative FTA with positive politeness to lessen it. However, *sajiao* presents a challenge to the theory of Brown and Levinson

because it appears to be doing both positive and negative facework at the same time, unlike their existing interpretations of adult use of child-like speech, which label it as purely negative politeness.

However, *sajiao* completely loses its power outside of Chinese culture, due to its reliance on the listener valuing positive face over negative face, and also its exploitation of Confucian roles. Without the hearer having the cultural background of a positive-face-valuing collectivist culture, and also the background to determine what is Confucian-appropriate behavior for men and women, parents and children, ruler and ruled, women cannot use this strategy to gain covert power. In fact, a non-Chinese hearer, such as the American husbands of Chinese women quoted earlier, typically interprets *sajiao* as aggressive, not complimentary, and reacts negatively. *Sajiao* can only be used and understood within this culture.

Sajiao is a tool of covert power because the woman who uses it gains power not by society's conventional means like respect or intimidation, but instead by purposefully appearing powerless. This method of power through powerlessness is not weakness, but a clever exploitation of restrictive cultural modes, something of a Confucianism hack, a non-obvious work-around to a tricky problem. Chinese women are empowered by this gender-specific tool, and very effectively use it gain power in their intimate relationships.

V. Conclusions

The linguistic processes outlined in this paper all show how Chinese women strategically use their language to gain power. In the past fifty years Chinese women have experienced a great shift in legal rights and social role, enjoying much greater access to education, and joining the workplace alongside men. In the traditional Communist state-owned workplace, women and men are assigned their job after college regardless of gender, and women are not restricted in workplace politics by their gender as they are able to draw the power of their official rank within the organization. This confidence in hierarchical job status can be seen in the workplace conflict conversation, where Lili contradicts her male coworkers without hedges. In this situation, women effectively move from the Confucian role of "woman" to the Confucian role of "ruler."

However, in the foreign-owned corporate workplace, where employees must vie for their jobs on an open market, and where Western attitudes towards what is appropriate work for men and women influence hiring, women are judged differently than their male coworkers. Specifically, women are judged on their attractive, soft-spoken language, as they are predominately hired as receptionists and secretaries. These women, in response to this linguistic pressure, selectively alter their language to more closely match that of the prestige variety, and therefore make themselves seem more prestigious. Within state-owned business, where language is not as important, this prestige-seeking language shift does not happen, therefore making it a result of the linguistic pressures put upon these corporate women.

Unlike in business and government, within family and personal life Chinese women still follow the traditional roles for them set out by Confucius, they are subservient and deferent to males and elders, and do their best to maintain familial harmony at the expense of their own

personal opinions and desires. This is seen in the family conflict talk involving Lanlan, where she tries to state her opinion, but when it causes discord she is the first to let it drop to regain peace.

However, even within their Confucian role, Chinese women are not powerless, as evidenced by *sajiao. Sajiao* represents a clever subversion of surface-level Confucian power dynamics, where men are superior and women are subservient. When a woman uses *sajiao* she is coercing her listener to view doing what she wants not as a violation of his Confucian role as a man, but instead a fulfillment of it, as he is her beneficent superior, kind to her because it is his duty.

It is clear from these illustrations that Chinese women are very capable of straddling their society's public/private divide of being both men's equals in one realm but their inferiors in another, and can alter their language to fit specific situations, and gain power. Chinese women are powerful, and their language is one tool they use very effectively to build and maintain their power in these different settings.

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